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THE USE OF THE STORY IN RELIGIOUS TEACHING.

ON every side the thought of men is turning toward teaching and teachers. It seems impossible to estimate the intensity of the interest which turns each day in this direction.

TEACHING

It is an opportune question whether, in this widespread interest, the merit of the Bible, as a source of information on the subject of teaching, has been appreciated.

The greatest men of the world's history have been the teachers of the world. They may not all have been professional teachers, and yet the world has called its favorites

ISRAEL'S GREAT MEN TEACHERS

great, because of something which the world had learned from them. If this is true at large, it is especially true of the great men of Bible history.

Moses was, in a strong sense, the schoolmaster of Israel. David taught Israel not only how to make war, but likewise how to make poetry. The prophets, one and all, were teachers, and their highest merit lies in the fact that their teaching was ethical. In a still stricter sense the sages, Israel's philosophers, were teachers. Jesus himself was the greatest teacher the world has seen, and his methods, when analyzed, will be found to be those with which the world today is just beginning to be acquainted. His disciples were pupils, and the great names of the New Testament Scriptures are in each and every case the names of teachers.

But back of all this, and explanatory of it all, is the relationship of God himself to that ancient nation of Israel. The

time was when Israel, like Edom, Moab, and Ammon, was on the level, ethically and spiritually, of the many wandering tribes in the midst of which the nation had its origin. But some controlling

GOD A TEACHER THROUGH ISRAEL

factor existed in the case of Israel which did not exist in connection with the other nations. The latter have consequently

passed out of mind, and are no longer known even by name Israel, on the other hand, because of the presence of this peculiar factor, has furnished a history the most striking and the most significant that has been enacted upon the surface of the earth; a history with which we may well believe not only earth, but heaven, has had to do. A divine power has acted through Israel for the uplifting of the world at large, just as a great teacher's power is communicated through that teacher's disciples for the promulgation of his teaching. From its infancy as a nation, up through the various stages of growth, Israel was led and taught, until the divine teaching in its most perfect and complete form found expression in the life and work of the Great Teacher, who himself was the son of this same God, the God of Israel and the God of the world. Every step of this history shows methods of teaching and methods of guidance which have in them greater wisdom than human wisdom. The child was taken at the very moment of its birth, nay, even while it was still in its mother's womb, and day by day, year by year, and century by century the educational work went on. The process is a complete one, and there is no phase of pedagogical work which does not find full illustration.

It would seem, therefore, that in view of the wonderful character of the work accomplished—results in the way of education that may not possibly be computed—this Bible of ours might fairly be regarded as a source of information on teachers and teaching. Method in teaching must in every case be determined by the environment in which the teacher and his pupil find themselves. No rigid method can be employed with success. In teaching, as perhaps in no other field of work, individualism must have full play. A study of the teachers whose work is described in the Old and New Testament Scriptures will show how a particular method, when adopted, has been modified to meet the requirements of each particular case. The wealth of pedagogical material to be found in the Scriptures is beyond computation.

*THE BIBLE
AND
PEDAGOGY*

One of many methods of which at this time special mention may be made is *the story*. The book of Daniel, considered in the last number of *THE BIBLICAL WORLD*, is an illustration of this method, but there are many other examples of it, among which may be counted the wonderfully pleasing and instructive stories found in Genesis and Exodus, in Samuel and Kings. No form of teaching is used more frequently than that of the story. Sometimes the story appears in a long-drawn-out series, closely connected, as in the case of the pentateuchal stories. At other times it is a single story, or a group of stories gathered about a single character, as in the case of Jonah.

*THE "STORY"
AS A METHOD
OF TEACHING*

In every case we note the almost perfect artistic form employed, and in this lies the greatest charm of these well-known stories. The significance of art, in its many applications, is just beginning to be understood in connection with pedagogy. Perhaps it may be questioned whether any considerable number of even the better class of teachers yet appreciate its meaning. The artistic form of the Old Testament stories, their simplicity, and their perfect transparency, explain the hold which they have taken upon the human heart in all centuries.

*THE ART
IN THESE
STORIES*

A second point to be observed is the lack of interest shown in matters of a merely technical character. The story-teller has little care for exact dates, or, indeed, for any dates. His numbers are, for the most part, three and seven and forty, numbers of symbolical meaning. He is not always careful to indicate the correct chronological order of events, for this accuracy would not always be consistent with the great purpose of the story. And, above all, he does not exert himself, seemingly, to furnish all the details of a story which might justly have been expected from the historian's point of view. Much that would have been interesting and valuable is omitted, because, indeed, it does not bear upon the thought which controls the writer in the selection of his material.

*ABSENCE OF
THE TECHNICAL*

And, moreover, while on the one hand care is taken to eliminate everything that does not bear specifically upon the lesson of the story, there is no hesitation to add to the actual skeleton of facts the warm coloring of the writer's own times and thoughts, his sympathies and his antipathies. This, indeed, was an essential element in the story, and this it is that distinguishes the story, though it is historical, from history itself. For a story, in order to exert influence, and have permanency, must be more than a mere external narrative. It must be, at least in a measure, historical; but it must also be the outgrowth of the soul's experience, and in every case the soul must be one of many similarly touched; and still further, the soul must be one touched in some way by the Holy Spirit itself.

Three things, at least, deserve consideration in connection with the story method of teaching, especially as it is found in the Old Testament.

1. The world knows no such stories for the purpose of teaching as those which are to be found in the Bible. Every subject which a teacher would desire to teach will find frequent and striking illustration. Human life presents no phase of experience which the Scripture stories have left untouched; and this universality is no greater than the vividness with which it characterizes the presentation. Much has been said concerning the lack of artistic development among the Hebrews. Painting and sculpture were forbidden, because in those days art in this sense could exist only in connection with idolatry. The artistic sense of the nation was restricted, therefore, to the field of literature. On lyric and on story this restricted interest concentrated itself, and we may well be satisfied that Israel held her artistic effort within such narrow bounds in view of the results which have been given to us in the form of lyric and story.

2. Still greater appreciation of the Old Testament story will come, and even greater will be the influence which it exerts, when it is clearly understood that it is *story*, rather than *history*.

We would not at this point be misunderstood. It is distinctly to be taught that this material to which reference has been made is historical. That is not the point at issue. *STORY, NOT HISTORY* The question is a merely literary one. The material was not given to us in the cold, technical, and rigid form of historical science, but rather in the warm and living coloring which characterizes the literary story. Its very force and significance lie in the fact that it is story, rather than history; that underneath and back of the presentation lies in every case a controlling motive, a great thought, placed by the supreme divinity in the heart of him who frames and formulates the story. Here is to be found its strength, and likewise its beauty.

3. From the way in which these stories are presented, from the study of their adaptation to the environment in which they had their origin, from a consideration of the points of relationship between the teller of the story and the people who received it, material may be gathered bearing directly on a particular method of teaching which, perhaps, needs greater emphasis today than it has received in more recent years. *INDIVIDUALISTIC* A nation is, after all, only an enlargement of the individual, and food for the nation must be, for the most part, food which an individual may receive. For that matter, a study of these stories will show that they were primarily intended for individuals, and that only as individuals made up the nation were they, in any sense, national.

4. Still a fourth point may be added. Are Israel's stories too religious in their form and content for modern use? It must be conceded that, for the most part, they are distinctly religious in their tone and teaching. *RELIGIOUS* They reflect a personal God. Some of the earlier stories may appear to be grossly anthropomorphic in their representation of God. If so, it is because only such expressions could be understood clearly by a nation in the early periods of its childhood. Let us not forget that for this very reason children may best be taught of God and of man by stories of this character. The use

of abstract terms will utterly fail to gain the end desired. We must be satisfied to approach the highest ideals of thought gradually, and this may be done through the story where it cannot be done through what may be regarded as simplified abstractions.

In conclusion we urge those upon whom there has been placed the responsibility of giving instruction to children, or to young men and women, that they consider seriously the lessons which may be gained from a study of the form and content, the method and significance, of the *story* in Scripture.



THE TRANSFIGURATION

By Raphael